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S E R M O N

Preached in the

CHAPEL of the ASYLUM,

Near WESTMINSTER-BRIDGE,

ON THE

SUNDAY before CHRISTMAS-DAY, 1760.

By WILLIAM HAZELAND, M. A.

Vicar of BENGEO, in HERTFORDSHIRE, and Lecturer of
ST. MARY WHITE-CHAPEL, LONDON.

L O N D O N,

Printed for J. BEECROFT, at the *Bible*, in *Pater-noster-Row*.

MDCCLXI.

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S E R M O N

Preached in the

CHURCH of the ASSUMPTION

West Westminster-Abode



Sunday June 1st 1841

By WILLIAM HARRISON

Author of the

History of the

Church of the

Assumption, &c.

London

To the Right Honourable the Earl of LITCHFIELD,

PRESIDENT;

The Right Honourable CHARLES TOWNSHEND,

Sir ARCHER CROFT, Bart.

Sir JOSEPH HANKEY, Knt. and Alderman,

ASHETON CURZON, Esq;

VICE-PRESIDENTS;

And to the Rest of the GUARDIANS

Of the ASYLUM;

THIS DISCOURSE,

Published at the Request of the GUARDIANS,

Before Whom it was delivered,

Is most humbly Inscribed,

By their most obedient Servant,

The AUTHOR.

To the Right Honourable the Earl of LITCHFIELD,

PRESIDENT,

The Right Honourable CHARLES TOWNSHEND,

ST. ARCHER CROFT, &c.

ST. JOSEPH WANKY, &c. and Assistant,

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EPHESIANS, V. 16.

Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

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WHEN the great Law-giver of the *Athenians* was questioned concerning the nature of their government, and the propriety of his several institutions; he did not undertake to vindicate his laws as a complete system, nor to assert, that the constitution he had founded was the most perfect that could have been devised; he

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only maintained that they were suited to the state and dispositions of his countrymen; that they were the best which the *Athenians* were capable of receiving.

Thus, upon a review of the several charitable foundations, which distinguish and adorn this Metropolis, rendering it as well the happiest, as it is the greatest of cities, if it should happen, that any persons are not convinced of the necessity of some, or the beneficial tendency of others, considered in a general view; it might suffice for the particular advocates of any of these foundations to shew that the society they patronize is well adapted to the exigencies of the times, that it answers the end of its institution, and that such an end is become necessary or desirable.

Maxims of policy must be restricted in their application, by the circumstances of persons and things. It must be granted, that, in a less advanced state of our public manners, and during the virtuous simplicity of less polished ages, one or two establishments, that are now much attended to, and which have engaged the protection of the great, though they would always do honour to the humanity of their founders, would not so clearly have evidenced their judgment. The zealous admirers of ancient manners would have disapproved of them,

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as breaches of public discipline ; the severe virtue of others would have been offended at such consideration and indulgence shewn to the most profligate of mankind ; *Lycurgus* would have rejected such institutions from his strict *Spartan* government, though *Solon* would have yielded them admission among his more refined and less exemplary *Athenians*.

But whatever prejudices may lie against the design of *such* foundations, or whatever reasons may incline some to distrust their success, (which time, no doubt, will remove) it is the peculiar happiness of *this* society, to be erected on a plan that is clear from every shadow of objection. In whatever light we contemplate your generous labours, they will command universal approbation. The *politician* cannot but applaud an institution so directly pointing to the advantage of the common-wealth ; the *virtuous* man cannot be indifferent to acts of beneficence, exerted towards the natural and truest objects of compassion ; and the *Christian* will not fail to beg the blessing of Heaven on so exact and faithful an imitation of the unbounded charity of his Saviour.

Shall we then dwell a little on each of these heads ; and consider this sanctuary of the distressed in the several views of policy, humanity, and religion ? This may be a means of illustrating the nature and importance

of its institution, and of doing some justice to the merit of its supporters.

That it is of no little consequence to the general community to promote and preserve to every individual of the *sex* their genuine ornaments of purity and chastity, might be presumed even from this single consideration, that nature appears to have made this their characteristic excellence, to have furnished them with a more delicate sentiment of modesty, and a stronger abhorrence of impurity, than is observable in men; and that universal custom has seconded this kind provision of nature, appropriating the term of *virtue* in women to this single point of honour, as in men, it is applied, in several languages, by way of eminence, to denote the masculine qualities of fortitude and magnanimity.

But the importance of this accomplishment will be further evident, if we attend to the evil and ruin which must inevitably follow, as far as the want of it prevails, to civil society. Were conjugal infidelity to become common, were the characters of an *Agrippina* or a *Messalina* no longer shocking or extraordinary, the consequence must needs be, that the marriage union would soon grow into disuse. Would any man think of forming that most intimate alliance with such abandoned associates, with whom he could not even hope for harmony and peace?

Destitute of that sweet intercourse of friendship, which endears this Society, and constitutes its peculiar bliss; Stranger to that generous sympathy, those kind sollicitudes and officious cares, which unite the hearts of lovers, and feed the vigorous flame of a never-dying passion; what remains for the wretched husband, but to drink the foulest dregs of the cup of pleasure, made insipid by coldness, poisoned by disgust? Yet, though deprived of all matrimonial comfort, let him not therefore hope for an exemption from domestic misery: let him dread the burthen of children he cannot acknowledge, for whom he could have no feeling of parental tenderness, and whose very sight, instead of inspiring delight and joy, must pierce his mind with the sharpest stings of ignominy and reproach.

In short, matrimony and chastity would be at an end together: Matrimony, that holy estate, instituted by God, in the time of man's innocence. The foundation of — relations dear, and all the tender names — of father, son, or brother, — must then never more be heard of! But what is the event? Matrimony is the source of population; while prostitution is ever cursed with barrenness, and seldom has any fruit but disease and despair, (a strong testimony that nature never intended such an abuse of our appetites), the faithful marriage-bed generally teems with fertility and increase, blesses the parent's hopes,
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with a happy offspring, and strengthens and supports the community, by an addition to its members.

And as thus Society owes no less than its very being and continuance to this prolific union, we find, that, in all well-policied governments, an unwearied application has been given to encourage and promote it: that fornication and adultery have been punished as crimes against the State, as well as against Religion: on the one hand, the highest marks of honour and distinction, accompanied with the most valuable privileges, have been conferred on the fathers of numerous families; on the other, men have been fined, and rendered infamous, for refusing, at a proper age, to enter into nuptial engagements. But wherefore this artificial management? Why call in the civil aids of reward and punishment, to enforce the strong suggestions of nature? External constraint will vainly operate, where desire is not awakened and prompted from within. Give us partners such as God designed them. Let us see your matrons faithful and exemplary, and your maidens virtuous and discreet; leave then the rest to nature: she will never fail to bind the connubial tie as frequently as the utmost wants of society can require. — Formed as we are with a strong sensibility of the charms of beauty; susceptible of the soft impressions, submissive to the winning graces, and drawn by the powerful attraction, of female virtue,
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the matrimonial interest will ever prevail among us, when nature is not corrupted or perverted from her course.

Let it not be understood, that we would insinuate so unjust a reflection on the virtuous part of the female world, as that the defect of that influence, which the good of the public demands their sex should have over the males, is at all chargeable on them. Characters of real excellence will never fail to maintain and evince their true sterling worth; though, fallen among counterfeits, they, for some time, pass undistinguished, and lose their due portion of esteem.

It is to the profligate part of the sex, to those that are lost to virtue and to shame, that we may justly ascribe the backwardness of men to enter into the married state, and the consequent loss which the nation feels in its strength and populousness. While these expose their venal endearments to the giddy, and the unthinking; while the appetite, implanted by nature, for the propagation of mankind, is, by these, rendered abortive, or, by their unhallowed gratification, becomes even the means of human destruction; the sacred passion of Love is entirely sunk and lost; and the brutal usurper that fills its room, instead of leading its hapless votaries to the *Hymenæal* union, joins with Avarice in representing and aggravating its difficulties and inconveniences. Mis-
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led by such seduction, and, at length, broken and ruined in his health and constitution, the slave of vice thinks too late of a reformation, of returning into the paths of sobriety and virtue.

The number of those unhappy females, who, within these cities, lead lives of profligacy and debauchery, is computed to amount to a considerable part of the whole sex. The number of the males must be still more considerable, who, captivated by the others wiles, either fall into habits of barren celibacy, or have their days cut short by ignominious diseases. And what is the worst circumstance for the public, the men who are thus lost to posterity are most commonly those of easy or affluent fortunes, those who, of all others, have no reason, from their employments, or indigence, to delay, or to refuse, the payment of that debt, which they owe to their country.

What a melancholy prospect is here presented of the human species! It was time to endeavour after a remedy for this growing evil; or the desolation of our country, the utter extirpation of mankind, would finally have ensued.

The part which the Founders of this Society have taken, for the accomplishment of this noble and necessary design, is what reason would dictate, and common

mon sense must approve. To prevent the contagion of debauchery from spreading to a future generation, is a more promising attempt, than to aim at a cure, where the plague is begun. When a city is on fire, you will more easily stop the conflagration by cutting off its communication with the parts that are yet entire, than by striving to extinguish and save the buildings already in flames. Indeed the latter should not be omitted, wherever there are hopes of success. Where there is the least prospect of reclaiming to virtue a fallen character, it should certainly be attempted. For in a political, as well as in a religious view, repentance is merit. But if mere habits of thinking, if speculative opinions are observed to take such deep root, even in the minds of philosophers, that demonstration cannot sometimes shake them, so that truth has been forced to appeal to a future generation, as yet untainted with prejudice, before she could establish her throne; what is to be thought of confirmed habits of acting; of customs long established, by actions repeatedly renewed, by passions irregularly gratified, and therefore irregularly craving, when all sense of modesty is lost, when the checks of shame, and even the stings of conscience, are no longer felt or known? Can the *Æthiopian* change his skin, or the Leopard his spots? There is indeed a bare possibility, and that is all, of working a reformation in characters so flagrantly vicious, in such veteran, habituated sinners.

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To the praise of your prudence, You have proceeded on a less desperate attempt. You have sought out the causes that naturally expose the female heart to this pernicious sin, that by removing their operation you might prevent their effect. The most obvious and general of these causes appeared to be poverty and distress, the want of a parent's care to form the tender mind, or support the yet infirm body, when either death had taken them away from their orphan children, or flagitious vice had made them unfeeling and relentless, and capable of forsaking their own offspring. In such hopeless circumstances, there is even a moral certainty that the infant breast must be corrupted, must practise debauchery, even before it feels desire. Other kinds of distress, akin to the former, will, doubtless, next engage your care; 'till, at length, as your Society increases, every species of misfortune, that can befall an innocent female, and that is likely to become an occasion of sin, shall here, we trust, find an asylum and refuge;—'till distress shall then no longer be an incentive and temptation to profligacy, but shall become, and by your means, the happy instrument of preserving female virtue.

And although, in the present state of things, this may appear chimerical; though, in the present deluge of vice and impurity, your little sanctuary of
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female honour may appear like the ark of *Noah*, floating upon an over-flowed and drowned world, yet be not discouraged by the vastness of the enterprise; that single fabrick was sufficient to preserve the whole animal race from destruction; and, by the blessing of Providence, this wise institution, though at present in a confined infant state, may, in its end and consequences, become effectual to the preservation of the whole female nation.

Nor are the present effects of your care too unimportant to engage the public attention.

That little company of females, born to household care, and the service and conduct of families, must have purity untainted by vice, or the breath of evil fame, accompanied with some degrees of knowledge and skill, before they will be qualified even for the lowest stations for which Providence may have designed their lives. Early informed in virtue, they shall become diligent and faithful servants; and having, by these necessary accomplishments, recommended themselves to the virtuous and industrious of the other sex, they shall practise with credit the matron duties, as good wives, and mothers of a numerous issue. Had the foundation of these qualities, a good education, been denied them, they must have been sent forth a naked defenceless multitude, unprepared to stand the siege of libidinous fury, to

evade the wily approaches of insidious passion ; and so, mastered by the first temptation, they would have tasted the fatal fruit of forbidden pleasure, which would soon have opened their eyes to a view of their ruin.—From this unhappy period, every page of the female history is overcast with misery and horror. They become a burthen to themselves alike, and to the state, which supports them. For no sooner is the virgin's heart made the captive of sin, than it becomes a faithless renegade to its former virtues, takes the pay of vice, and practises in turn all the delusive arts, for the treachery and baseness of which its own fall became the object of pity. Converts, whether in opinion or practice, go directly into the other extreme. That vestal modesty, the guardian of its forsaken innocence, is succeeded in the fallen female by a frontless impudence, the pander of the vilest prostitution, prompting her to work all uncleanness with greediness, and from sin to become most exceeding sinful.

Even the selfish, therefore, should consider that every single female, whom the care of this Society has saved from that pollution, is a brand snatched from the fire, which otherwise might have consumed themselves. Your Sons, Yourselves might possibly have been led astray by her harlot lure. If it be an affront to the steady virtue of any here present to suppose them liable to be vanquished by such weak
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assailants, let them reflect, that there is such a thing as being too sufficient. The Apostle directs him that standeth to take heed lest he fall. It is too exalted a strain for human nature to multiply temptations, in order to approve our resolution in withstanding them, and voluntarily to demand the fire ordeal, in order to attest our innocence.

I have been long on this topic of the prudence and good policy of the institution before us; but, I hope, I shall also have your attention, while I dispatch, in a few words, the two remaining heads of humanity and religion.

II. There are some sublime tempers, whose benevolence disdains all self-regards, and scorns to proceed on maxims of prudence; who endeavour to imitate the Deity himself, by the practice of disinterested charity; at least, shut their eyes to every prospect of temporal good, while their hands are open to succour the miserable! To such we need only present objects of wretchedness, and we immediately light up the virtue of compassion; before them poverty smiles, and is relieved.—Now can any condition be more truly pitiable than that of helpless orphans, destitute of a parent's assistance to form their minds, by that instruction which human nature requires, in order to the due exertion of its faculties,
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and thereby deprived of all that happiness in civil life, which they were born indeed with capacities to enjoy, but, from the misfortune of their birth, they must for ever lose, without your fostering, parental tenderness?

Some kinds of pity the severe moralist is ready to condemn as a weakness — When Vice is made a public example of punishment, or even when Folly incurs the distresses consequent upon its unwary pursuits, the Sage will not allow the sensible heart to be moved, to drop the tear of sympathy, or heave one sigh of sadness. — But when not Vice nor Folly, but Innocence, is unfortunate; when the young plants of nature's choicest production, that might be nourished to a plentiful harvest of virtue, are pining and languishing in a thirsty soil, and for want of the kindly dews of benevolence must wither where they sprung; who can blame the compassionate relieving bosom? It is wisdom, it is not effeminacy to be softened to pity by such objects, and he is the greatest hero who sinks the soonest.

Indulge then, here indulge, all You who hear me, the tenderest sentiments with which Humanity can inspire you on the present occasion. And when, from reflecting on the happy escape from sin and misery, which this little flock of God have made through

through the bounty of their founders, and on the numbers that are yet left behind a prey to infamy, You feel that conviction in your hearts of the use of this establishment, which surpasses the cold assent of the understanding; let us exhort you to promote what you approve.

The motives for the prosecution of this benevolent design, suggested by the view we have already taken of our subject, are rational and affecting; but they will appear but weak and trivial, when compared with those strong incitements, with which Christianity inforces this labour of love. I should vainly endeavour, at the close of this discourse, to set before you all the glorious promises, convincing arguments, lively representations, and most pathetic admonitions, with which the Saviour of mankind, whose life was a continued course of universal charity, desired to provoke his followers to the same blessed practice: that would be to transcribe every page of the New Testament. I must recall to your minds every important passage in the history of our Redeemer, before I could hope to execute at large the picture of Christian beneficence. I must have formed to you the character of a most august Being, enlightened with every ray of the Godhead, but submitting, with the noblest condescension, to be clothed with human flesh and frailty, to save from inevitable ruin a perishing race of creatures. And
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when he had stooped to this abasement, and was found in the fashion of a man, you must have seen him, for the same generous purpose, subject himself to the lowest wretchedness, misery, and distress, of which that condition was capable, throughout a long course of painful exhortation. After this divine Pilgrim had exemplified in his actions every human virtue, illustrated and gilded over with a profusion of goodness, I must have set him forth to your view, accused as a seditious blasphemer; imprisoned by the hands he had set free; arraigned, judged, and condemned, by the very people, whose happiness had been the pursuit of his life. — The arduous work of beneficence, which he had undertaken, was not to be accomplished without his death. And if, after the preceding scene of unparalleled generosity, your hearts could have endured the horrid spectacle, You should have seen Him, who had legions of Angels at his command, and could have called all the powers of nature to his aid, yielding himself to the weak malice of his ungrateful creatures, submitting to the most ignominious death, for their sakes who inflicted it upon him.

Amidst bonds and buffetings, reproaches and stripes, he walks forth undaunted to the fatal hill of *Calvary*; sees, and is forced to assist, the horrid preparations of torment, and at last — but it is beyond description — Nature itself drew a veil over the dreadful

ful scene — the light of the world was withheld — the Sun could not behold a crucified Saviour — What wonder, O blessed *Immanuel*, if the rocks rent, and the graves were opened — if Earth trembled to its center, and all creation sympathised with thy sufferings? And shall not the obdurate heart of man be mollified by thy goodness? — This should have been the principal figure in that draught of Christian beneficence, which it is beyond my abilities to paint, and my presumption to attempt. A form, which all the Hierarchies of Heaven must gaze upon with admiration, while Man, his redeemed creature, should approach with humblest worship, and weakly strive to imitate such disinterested Bounty!

But, in suggesting this great example of perfect goodness, I have perhaps gone counter to my intention. For will not the brightest instances of human benefits, the most generous and bountiful actions Men do to each other lose all their light, when set in the splendour of such heavenly beneficence? Have we not then cast a shade on the present Institution, instead of setting it off to advantage, and satirized, where we meant an encomium? — But such is equally the case of all human virtue, when compared with the divine. So faint is the resemblance, so lame and imperfect a copy are our best actions, when viewed together with the gracious benevolence of Christ to Mankind. Happily it is not in the degree, but the

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kind of actions, that we are required to be perfect, as God is perfect. It is in the sort of behaviour, not in the high accomplishment of it, that we are to follow the exact pattern of our Saviour's life. And let it be remembered, as the highest praise of the promoters of this Society, that we are all able to trace their likeness to the conduct of Him, who *commanded young children to be brought unto him, and exhorted all men to follow their innocency. Verily I say unto you, that whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.*

F I N I S.

